

Emergency Encounter and other Reminiscences

Those days ‘IDMA delegation to Delhi’ reminded me of a “States of India – Fancy Dress Parade” in our High School. The Ganesan and Krishnamurthy from Madras (then it was not Chennai, though), in their South Indian Dhotis, long Jubbas and colourful Khadi shawls, Sens and Dutta Guptas from Calcutta (only spelt Kolkata then) in their Bengali kurtas and Bengali dhotis, G.P.Nair in his all white pant and close-coat with white “Gandhi” cap, Rastogi from Kanpur with an open western jacket, Hasmukhbhai from Ahmedabad, occasionally in his kurta – pyjama and the immaculately dressed Bombay boys Dr.Patani, J.B.Mody and K.M.Shah, of course Bhai Mohan Singh or his colleagues from Delhi. IDMA represented 100% Indian Companies. There were a couple of Indian Companies who were highly Indian, but with foreign collaborations or tie-ups, like Sarabhai, Unichem and others. Often such delegations used to be preceded by deliberations with well-connected influential leaders like Mr. A.V. Mody (not yet Padmabhushan those days) and somewhat reclusive industry leaders like Dr.K.A. Hamied (Jamia Millia, Zakir Hussain and the entire ‘gandhi’ clan). Dr. K.A. Hamied was extremely outspoken devoid of diplomatic niceties (hypocrisy in plain English) when attacking the politicians and bureaucrats. Being in the ruling party, the then IDMA President, Mr.G.P.Nair, could speak out to the chief guests of IDMA Annual Sessions, whether it was K.D.Malavia, Triguna Sen, Sanjvayya or the like very bluntly. But, after Dr.K.A.Hamied spoke out (calling a spade a spade) there used to be ‘moments of silence’ arising out of embarrassment (from both sides). Such plain speaking helped to shape Nation-friendly policies. Not that the politicians were not nationalistic, most of them were.

I remember, behind the scene deliberations preceding Hathi Committee (they used to be mostly held in the residence Mr.Arvind Thacker (I believe he was the Themis Group director in Delhi, then). Contributions made by persons like the then M.P (later Minister) Mr. K.R. Ganesh (from Andamans) were commendable. Irrespective of party affiliations, well-informed M.Ps and party leaders used to participate in preparatory deliberations which often used to go on till midnight. The mostly available accommodation in Delhi used to be Janpath and Claridges. Expert contributions from Dr. Behl, the then IDPL-MD is worth remembering.

More than once we went to Delhi, with prior appointment to meet the then P.M. Mrs. Indira Gandhi. At one time, we were even ushered in through

security check (first time for me through electronic security), only to be told later than she had to leave for some urgent matter. We landed up with Dr. Patani's BHU-mate, Mr.K.C. Pant, then a cabinet Minister, in the garden of this residence, discussing industry issues late into the evening.

After one such visit, I stayed over with my sister who was staying in Chanakyapuri. The day I chose to take the flight back to Bombay, Delhi had become like the then Moscow. Everybody who was somebody was being hauled up including some bureaucrats. Security check at the Airport was the tightest I had seen till then or even till now. I had bought some animated toys for my children and had some jokes exchanged with the security staff while they checked my handbag. After the final security check, when I finished climbing the ladder into the aircraft, there were these plain clothes men in the aircraft (police or army, I don't remember), who had a look at my boarding pass and just lifted me by the collar and hauled me down the ladder and into a police jeep and back to a closed room in the terminal building. In all that melee, I lost one shoe and I could only limp - not walk (since I was mostly being dragged I had not too much problem). Only after the questioning started I could understand the reason. There was no "security checked" seal on my boarding card. Eventually they took me to the security counter, where everyone recognized me due to the jokes exchanged at the time of security. I was allowed to limp back to the plane and they turned their "attention" to the inept security.

Looking back, I feel that IDMA has been intensely interconnected for last 4 to 5 decades with National developments. It so happened, that we were in Delhi, when the now famous 'Rally' headed by Shri Jayaprakash Narain took place at the Boat Club (I still don't know what and why the name Boat Club). These were major National events which determined the course of events and change of Governments.

We had a wide range of C&F or P&C Ministers, mixed bag, a few very good ones, some made us cry (and laugh too). The Shukla brothers, Sanjiva Reddy, K.D. Malavya, Triguna Sen, Sanjivayya, H.N.Bahuguna in the early days and Jayachandra Singh from Manipur, Vasant Sathe in the later years. We had Mr.Ram Lakhani Singh Yadav who made us cry and laugh alternately. Dr.Sushila Nayyar is the most illustrious Health Minister I remember, and Vasant Sathe, the most glamorous C&F Minister.

We had our share of eminent Secretaries too. B.Shah was the oft-repeated name in hectically active policy forums. Lavraj Kumar, Ramanathan and in later years, Mr.M.S.Gill strike a bell. Among others Dr.Venketanarayanan did a lot for the Industry during the eighties. E.N Murthy, Dr,Vaidyanatha Iyer, Dr.Sankaran are some other names of the late eighties, early nineties.

Mr.Borker was the earliest Drugs Controller of India, I remember. He was very softspoken and grandfatherly even when he was young. Mr.Ramachandran was one of the most dynamic Drug Controller of India, I remember. He interacted closely, frankly, transparently and contributed immensely for the development of the Indian Pharma Industry.

One interesting feature of today I notice is very ancient in its roots. Whether it is a Minister or Secretary or 'NPPA' Chairman, whether he is a 'chief guest' at our Annual Day or has come down to Mumbai for a "Special Hearing" of our grievances, the more we prepared ourselves with prior consultations and committee meetings and made fabulous presentations and representations, invariably 9 out of 10 times, either the Minister was "dropped" on his return, got "reshuffled" or become a Governor. Similarly the Secretary retired or got reverted to his home turf, or became election commissioner and in case of NPPA Chairman, they mostly moved into oblivion, after the Nit Picking over "Process-loss" and "Packaging Costs".

In spite of all these, like the ever patient, never giving up "Bhagiratha" or the seventh time lucky "King Bruce", we went on and on to reach where we are. Can we (?), Should we (?) give up now. No, we have to continue, we have many a wars to win and if one is lost, we have to look forward to the battle to win.
